

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 23, 2004

Hon. Ann M. Veneman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th & Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

We are writing to express our opposition to the proposed rule published on July 16, 2004 to replace the existing Roadless Rule with a state-by-state petitioning process. We believe the Roadless Rule is critical if this nation is to meet the goals of conserving pristine areas of our national forests. By protecting these areas, we can ensure that they will continue to provide sources of clean drinking water, undisturbed habitats for fish and wildlife, and recreational opportunities.

Currently, road building and economic utilization such as logging and mining are allowed on more than half of our National Forest System lands. It is important that we protect and cherish our remaining wild places for environmental and recreational purposes alike. We believe the proposed rule, which would remove existing roadless protections and allow States to petition to re-instate these protections, would likely lead to the elimination of important protections currently provided by the Roadless Rule in most roadless areas.

We are particularly concerned about the precedent that this proposed rule sets with respect to management of our national forests. National forests are assets of concern to citizens throughout the United States, because they belong to all of us. We do not believe it is appropriate for State governors to make critical decisions about the management of Federal lands.

We hope you will reconsider this proposed rule, and either withdraw it or publish a final rule that truly protects designated roadless areas. In addition, we request that you extend the public comment period by at least 30 days to provide sufficient time for the public to analyze and comment on this proposal.

We appreciate your attention and look forward to working with you to protect and preserve our national forests.

Sincerely,



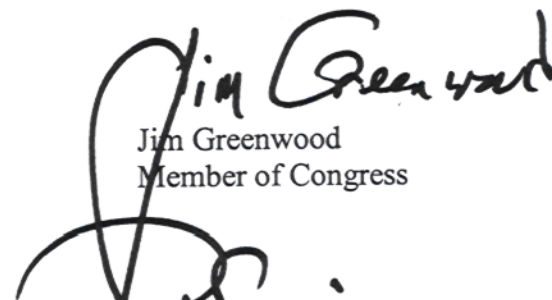
Christopher Shays
Member of Congress



Sherwood Boehlert
Member of Congress



Jim Ramstad
Member of Congress




Jim Greenwood
Member of Congress



Wayne Gilchrest
Member of Congress



Rob Simmons
Member of Congress



Mike Castle
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